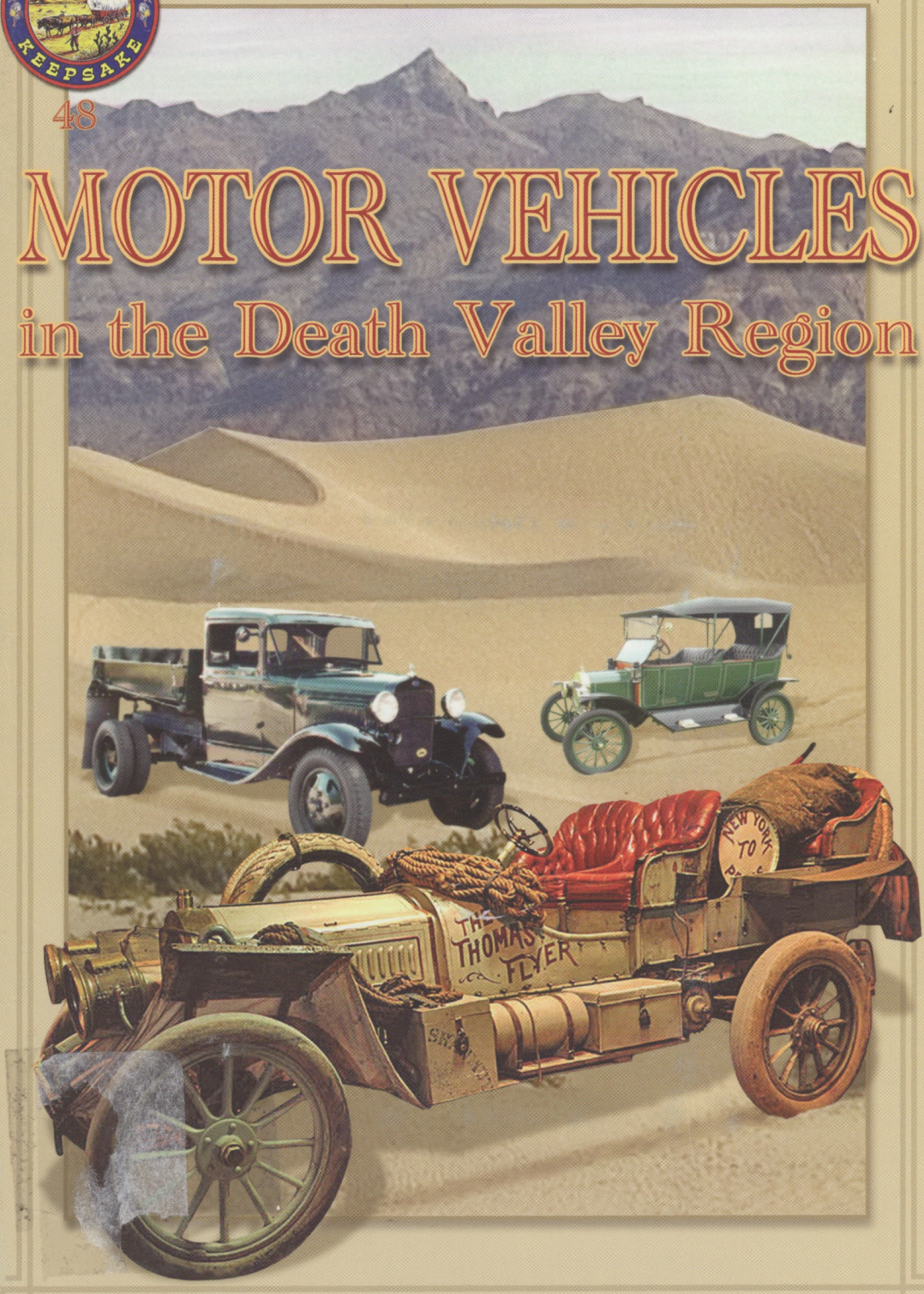
DEATH VALLEY 49ERS KEEPSAKE

48

MOTOR VEHICLES in the Death Valley Region



by Kenneth E. Lengner and Danny Ray Thomas

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KEEPSAKE No. 48

Published for the
59th Death Valley '49ers Encampment
November 5 - 9, 2008

Cover Design by
Death Valley '49er Directors
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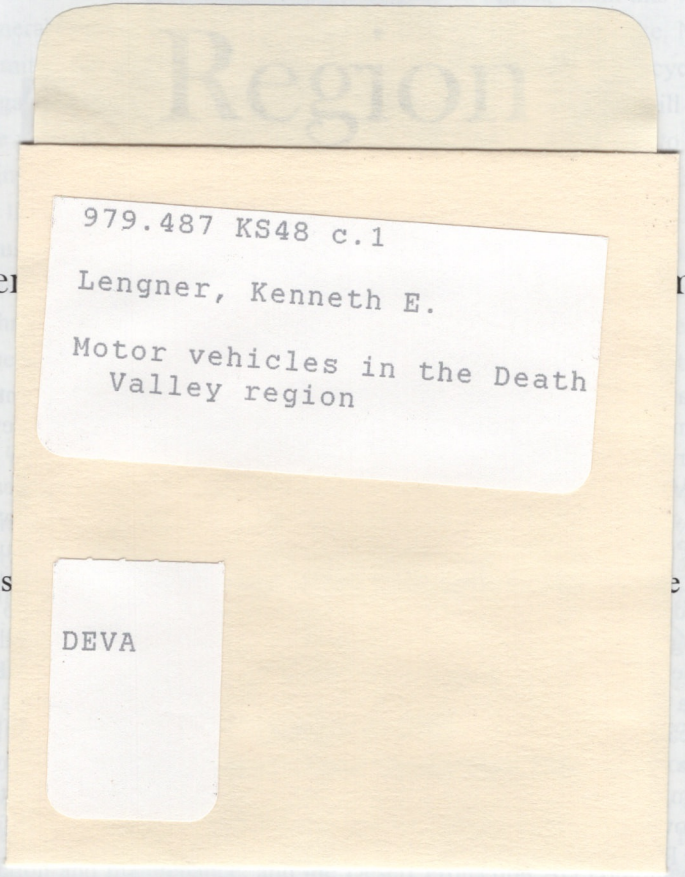
Cover Photo of the 'Thomas Flyer' is courtesy of the National Automobile Museum (The Harrah Collection), Reno, Nevada

Motor Vehicles in the Death Valley



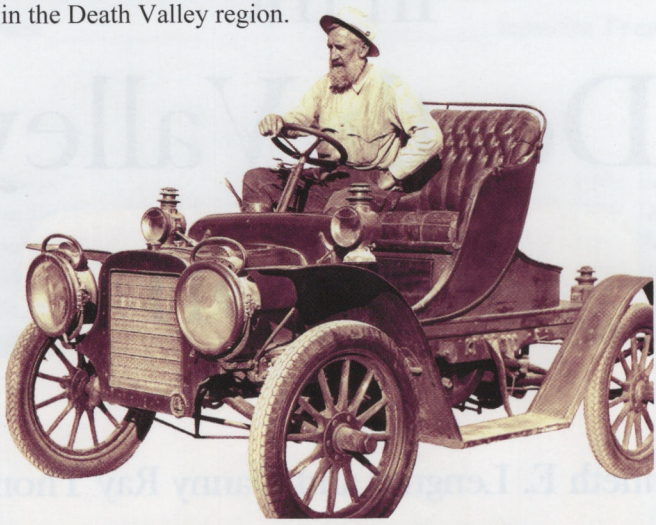
Ken nas

Publis e 2008

Printed by: Jostens Printing and Publishing; Visalia , California

Foreword

Keepsake number forty eight is a continuation of a series, harkening back to 1957. Each Keepsake describes aspects of history associated with the greater Death Valley region. Keepsakes have traditionally been booklets distributed to Death Valley '49er members as part of their annual membership package. This newest edition carries on that tradition by describing the history of motor vehicles in the Death Valley region.



Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following individuals who contributed their time and research for this Keepsake: Gene Elmore, Death Valley '49er Director for his extensive research; Blair Davenport, Curator (Cow Creek, Death Valley National Park (DEVA) whose support through the years and review of this Keepsake significantly impacted its quality; Ann Powell and Emily Pronovost who helped us in our research at the Cow Creek Curatorial Facility; Marcia Stout, Curator (Scotty's Castle, DEVA) who contributed knowledge and photos; Jean Pickard, Death Valley '49er Director who put the finishing touches on another exceptional cover. Those who contributed photos from their collections include: Death Valley National Park, Bancroft Library, Pomona Library, Rio Tinto Minerals, Union Pacific Railroad, Searles Valley Historical Society, University of Las Vegas Nevada Special Collections (Celesta Lowe; Revert, Crowell, and Lisle families), the National Automobile Museum (The Harrah Collection), Reno, Nevada, Frasher Fotos Collection and the following families or individuals: Gilliam, Brown, and Rosenburg families, George Ross, Stella Rook, and Dave Heffner.

Kenneth E. Lengner and Danny Ray Thomas,
Directors, Death Valley '49ers Publications Committee

Preface

Motor vehicles in the Death Valley region is quite a broad subject and needs some limitations applied to it, particularly in the somewhat abbreviated format of a Keepsake such as presented here. Therefore, we're going to restrict the meaning of motor vehicles to not include trains or planes. Trains in the Death Valley region was the subject of Keepsake number 35, *Take the Train to Death Valley*, has been well covered by Myrick in *Railroads of Nevada and Southern California,* written about by National Park historian Gordon Chappell and others, and addressed on many excellent websites. Planes in Death Valley is yet to get off the ground; yet, there is no room for it within these pages. We'll also exclude the traction engine, 'Old Dinah,' from this work for that venerable piece of machinery merits its own book or Keepsake. Now we have limited our subject matter to automobiles, trucks, and motorcycles that utilize gas or diesel for fuel. That is still a very broad subject. We will emphasize the years from the first vehicle to enter Death Valley in 1904, to the end of mining in Death Valley National Park in 1976. We will also be considering the old line, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Applying that philosophy allows us to utilize pictures of diverse vehicles and perhaps be a bit more cryptic in the text. There were many kinds of vehicles as well as many photographs taken through the years, We have tried to select photos that were spread over the timeframe of 1904 to 1976 with some current photos representing our modern vehicles also being included.

The initial need for motor vehicles in the Death Valley region was to meet a myriad of transportation requirements associated with finding and exploiting the region's mineral wealth. Motor vehicles and their roles would evolve as technologies improved and as their required roles changed. Tourism played an increasingly important role in determining the types of motor vehicles found in the region. The creation of a National Monument and subsequent National Park resulted in motor vehicles required to support their operations.

We have included brief discussions of roads and service stations because as motor vehicle use in Death Valley grew, more roads and service stations were built, in turn, stimulating more motor vehicle usage. These three grew and fed off of each other until mining losses, reduced National Park emphasis for road construction and maintenance, and the Desert Protection Act combined to reduce the amount of useable roads throughout the area.

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Motor Vehicles in the Death Valley Region

by Kenneth E. Lengner and Danny Ray Thomas

Introduction

The Death Valley region had its transportation requirements initially driven by trade and mining requirements, then by mining requirements, followed by a combination of mining and tourism requirements, and finally by predominately tourism requirements as overviewed in Figure 1. Motor vehicles started to meet some transportation requirements at the beginning of the twentieth century and gradually phased in to meet the vast preponderance of the current transportation requirements. Roads that had been used by horse or mule drawn wagons were expanded and improved upon to meet requirements imposed by the increasing use of motor vehicles. Stops along the roads changed from supplying hay and shoeing your animal, to providing oil, gasoline and repairs for the motor vehicles as well as accommodations for their drivers. Roads were built by mine owners, National Park Service, Counties, and entrepreneurs. The harsh Death Valley environment provided a testing ground and advertising ploy for motor vehicle related businesses. As motor vehicle capabilities increased, their role expanded from one of moving a few people to one of meeting bulk transportation and recreation requirements. The Death Valley region, Figure 2, has seen a wide diversity of motor vehicles since they first arrived in 1904.

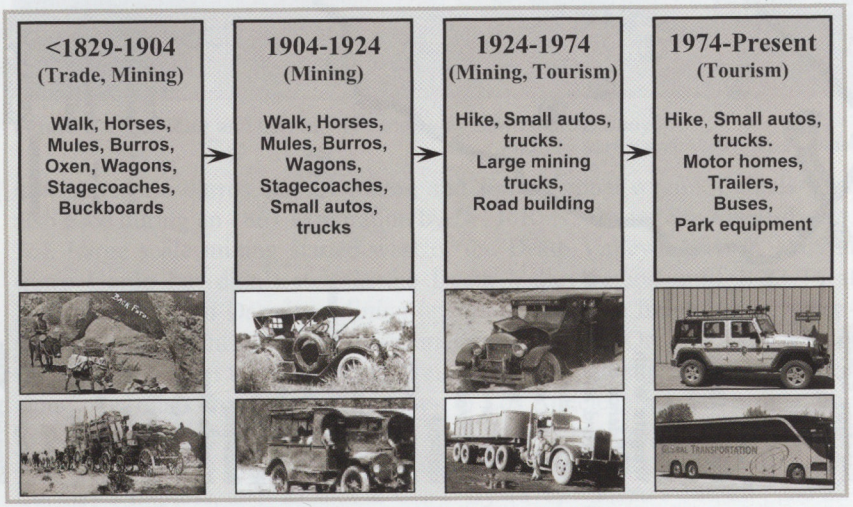
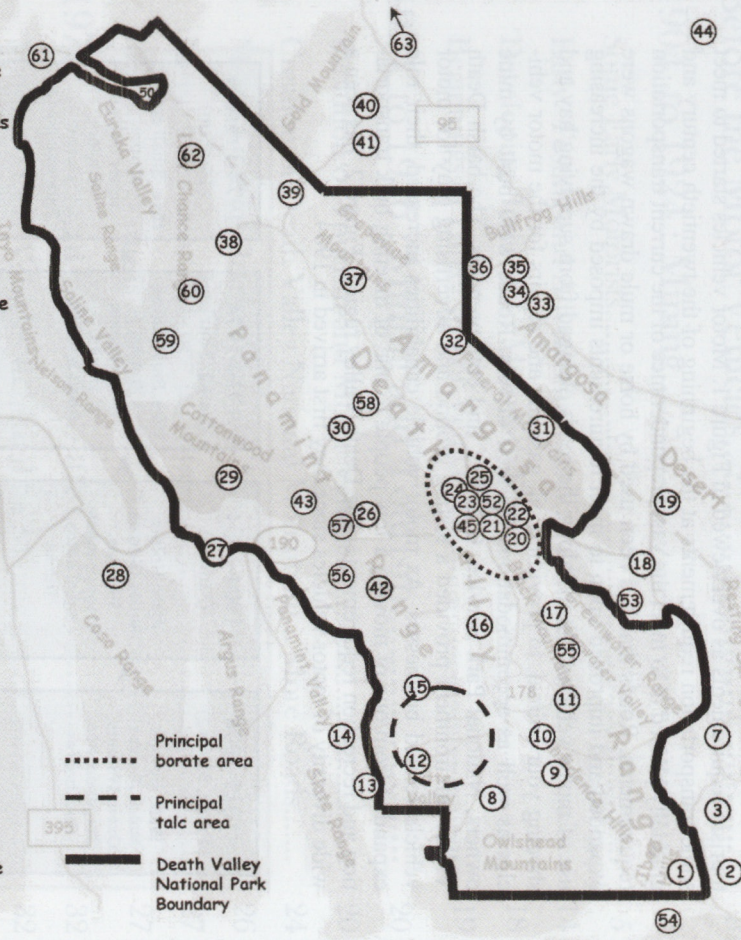


Figure 1 Overview of evolution of motor vehicles in the Death Valley region. *Lengner*

Figure 2 Death Valley Region's Towns, Mines, Mountains and Valleys



1 Saratoga Springs
2 Salt Spring Hills, mine
3 Zabriskie (townsite), Amargosa Borax Works
4 Tecopa
5 Resting Spring
6 Old Spanish Trail
7 Shoshone
8 Wingate Wash
9 Confidence mine
10 Ashford Mill, Shoreline Butte, Cinder Cone
11 Scotty's mine, Ashford mine
12 Anvil Spring
13 Goler Wash
14 Ballarat
15 Panamint City
16 Bennett's Well
17 Greenwater
18 Death Valley Junction
19 Ash Meadows, Devil's Hole
20 Ryan (Devar)
21 Badwater
22 Dante's View
23 Visitor Center
24 Harmony Borax
25 NPS Cow Creek
26 Skidoo, mines
27 Panamint Springs
28 Darwin
29 Lemoigne Canyon, mine
30 Stovepipe Wells
31 Lee, Hayseed mine
32 Keanne Wonder mine
32 Chloride Cliff
33 Carrara
34 Gold Center
35 Beatty
36 Rhyolite
36 Bullfrog
37 Leadfield
38 Ubehebe Crater
39 Scotty's Castle
40 Bonnie Claire
41 Gold Mountain
42 Harrisburg
43 Towne Pass
44 Timber Mtn. Caldera
45 Timbisha Shoshone Village
46 Eagle Borax
47 Schwab
48 Lila C.
49 Gerstley mine
50 Crater mine
51 Furnace Creek Ranch
52 Furnace Creek Inn
53 Lila C., Old Ryan
54 Denning Spring
55 Gold Valley
56 Wildrose
57 Emigrant Spring
58 "Old" Stovepipe Well
59 Salina, Lippincott mine
60 Ubehebe mine, Teakettle Junction
61 Loretto
62 Skookum
63 Tonopah

Before the Motor Vehicle

Many years before the arrival of the Anglo Europeans in the Death Valley region and the subsequent invention of motor vehicles such as the automobile and truck, Native Americans moved about by walking and carrying their goods in baskets or cradles. Sometime between approximately 1829 and 1849, Anglo Europeans, accompanied by draft animals such as burros, horses, or oxen packing goods or pulling wagons, made their appearance in the region. The first documented wagon to arrive in the Death Valley region was brought through Amargosa Canyon and past Resting Spring in 1846 by veterans of the Mormon Battalion which had fought in the Mexican American War. They were transporting tree and vine cuttings back to Salt Lake City, Utah. In December of 1849, lost members of a wagon train and their oxen drawn wagons straggled into the region. Some members discovered gold and what they thought was silver, precipitating prospectors rushing back to search for the hidden wealth. Prospectors (Figure 3), explorers, and their equipment were

Figure 3 Prospector and burros make their way down Marble Canyon.
Photo by Back, Death Valley National Park

transported via burros, horses, mules, and an occasional wagon. Camels were also used during an 1861 exploration by Dr. J. R. N. Owen (*See Keepsake No. 36*). Large scale mining started west of the Death Valley region in 1865 at Cerro Gordo but didn't start in the Death Valley region until 1873-74 at Panamint City and Darwin. Mining operations required freighting in of supplies and equipment as well as transportation for people. Ore was freighted out to the nearest train terminal. Large freight wagons and stagecoaches traveled along new roads from Panamint Valley to Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Lone Pine. The roads were pioneered by freighters such as Caesar Meyerstein and Remi Nadeau and stage coach outfits (Figure 4) like Dodge Brothers, Buckley's Express, and Rinaldi & Clark. By 1878, Nadeau's 18-, 20-, and 22-mule team wagons reached east to Resting Springs area and the lead-silver

1904 to 1924 : Mining Was Prime for Creating the Need for Motor Vehicle Use

Early motorists were driving flivvers (*flivvers* or *tin lizzies* were references to the early Model T Fords, *automobile*, was not coined until the twenties) between mining towns such as Goldfield, Beatty, Rhyolite, Skidoo, Greenwater, Death Valley Junction, Tecopa, and Shoshone. These motorists were prospecting for new mines, conducting business with remote mines, and taking an occasional pleasure trip. The heavy hauling was still via wagons and draft animals which changed sometime after World War I.

Some Early Motorists

In 1904, Geologist Gilbert Bailey had talked about but did not outfit a special car to explore Death Valley.

In the fall of 1904, Malcolm Macdonald skirted the edge of Death Valley.

Figure 6 shows the first car driven into Death Valley, a 1902 one cylinder Cadillac, and driver Lew R. Parker. He drove from Los Angeles through Barstow, past Cave Spring and possibly Bicycle Lake. He reached Confidence Mill and then drove through some narrow canyons and sandy washes to a small mine, perhaps the Old Confidence Mine. The trip was during a hot spell but Parker could not recall the month. He was a guide-chauffer for a Mr. Burr who made the trip to investigate conditions at Confidence Mine preparatory to a loan of $5,000 to the operators of that mine.

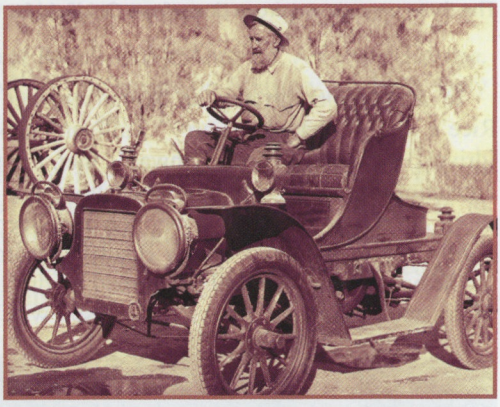


Figure 6 Lew Parker sits in a 1902 Cadillac which he drove into Death Valley in 1904. It was first motor vehicle driven into Death Valley.

Death Valley National Park
Courtesy Rio Tinto Minerals (U. S. Borax Collection)

By 1905, cars frequented Death Valley as seen in Figure 7.

In 1905, William F. "Alkali Bill" Brong, sans goggles and leather cap, operated the "Death Valley Chug Line" which provided automobile service from Goldfield to Rhyolite. Other early "taxi" drivers, or mahouts or chauffeurs as they were called at the time, competed with Brong in the auto stage business with their 7-passenger Pope Toledos and White Steamers. Brong is said to have driven from Goldfield to Rhyolite in the record time of 3 hours and 40 minutes. His daredevil driving exploits continued in the Bullfrog, Ash Mea-

mines there. From 1883 to 1888, the famous 20-mule team wagons (Figure 5) hauled borates from Harmony and Amargosa Borax Works to Mojave and Daggett. Basically, people and their possessions were hauled about the Death Valley region via animals and wagons until the advent of motor vehicles.

Figure 4 The Goldfield to Bullfrog stage line was one of many that hauled businessmen, miners, and other travelers anxious to get to whatever mining bonanza they thought they were involved in. *Photo by Back, Death Valley National Park*

Figure 5 The "20-mule team" (with 17 mules and 3 horses in this photo) unloads borates at Santa Fe railroad in Daggett. *Death Valley National Park*

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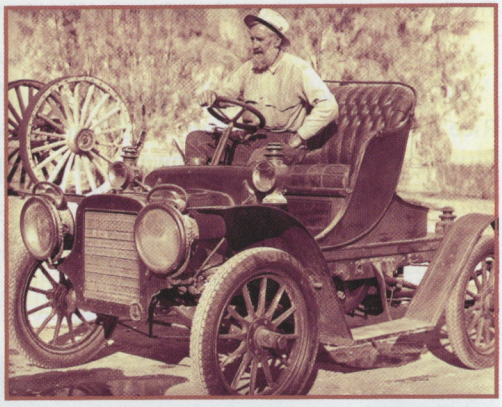

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dows, Greenwater (1906), and Gold Valley areas. By 1907, auto stages connected to Las Vegas, Skidoo and the Lee District. In 1907 the "Crackerjack Auto Transit Co." had daily runs from Silver Lake to Crackerjack at $15.00 per person. Other mahouts of the day included Teddy Tetzlaff, E. F. Burton, A. D. Renfro, and E. S. McArthur.

Figure 7 October 25, 1905 saw the opening of the elegant Montgomery Hotel in Beatty. The three cars shown drove down from Goldfield for the occasion.
Death Valley National Park

In June 1906, driving an 80-horsepower Pope Toledo, George Graham Rice's men ("Shanghai Larry" Sullivan, Jack Campbell, and James Hopper [driver]) outraced Charles Schwab's men to buy a promising gold mine in the Panamint Range. By this time, the automobile also played a more esoteric role as an advertiser of Gold Center Ice and Beer Company as seen in Figure 8. Surely, the residents of nearby Beatty welcomed its appearance. At this time, the heavy hauling was still performed by draft animals and wagons (Figure 9). Many prospectors still prowled the desert with their burros.

Figure 8 Beatty 1906. Automobile advertising the nearby Gold Center Brewing Company. *Death Valley National Park*

Figure 9 In 1906, freight teams still hauled heavy, bulky supplies from Las Vegas to Beatty and Rhyolite.
Death Valley National Park

After Shanghai Larry's dash to the Panamints, James Clark graded a road across Death Valley to Skidoo and opened a tent roadhouse (Figure 10) near the water seep known as Stove Pipe Wells in the winter of 1906.

In February of 1907, J. H. Carson used Clark's new road to become the first motorcyclist to cross the valley.

Figure 10 Stovepipe Wells supplies and restaurant. Photo 1908.
J. S. Cook Collection, Death Valley National Park

According to O. J. Fisk, in 1907 after the Greenwater crash, former "millionaire" Arthur Kunze had only enough cash to buy some food for him and his chauffeur and gas for his Pope Toledo car, which had cost him $5,000. On the way to the Manse Ranch in Pahrump Valley, they got stuck in some sand. Kunze gave the car to his chauffeur for wages due and walked to Manse Ranch, absolutely busted.

By 1907, approximately 200 cars in the Rhyolite area included: Oldsmobile, Ford, Pope Toledo, Pierce Arrow, Reo, Columbian, Apperson, and Thomas.

1908 was the year of the "Great Race" across America, Asia, and Europe. Six contenders started in New York's Time square on February 12, 1908. Only three of these contenders reached Death Valley.

The first to arrive was the Thomas Flyer, Figure 11, with drivers Harold Brinker and George Schuster and navigator Hans Hansen, which arrived in Rhyolite on March 21 having covered 3,120 miles in 39 days. They traveled over Clark's road to Stovepipe Wells, went on to Ballarat, proceeded to Daggett, and then went to San Francisco.

Figure 11 The American Thomas Flyer was the eventual winner of the 1908 Great Race.
Photo courtesy of the National Automobile Museum (The Harrah Collection), Reno, Nevada

A week later the Italian Brixia-Zust, shown in Figure 12, with drivers Emilio Sitori and Henri Haaga and accompanied by London newspaper correspondent Antonio Scaroglio, arrived in Rhyolite. They headed into Death Valley but took a wrong turn and ended up in Greenwater. They proceeded to the town of Zabriskie, went on to Cave Spring in the Avawatz Mountains, reached Daggett and went to Los Angeles.

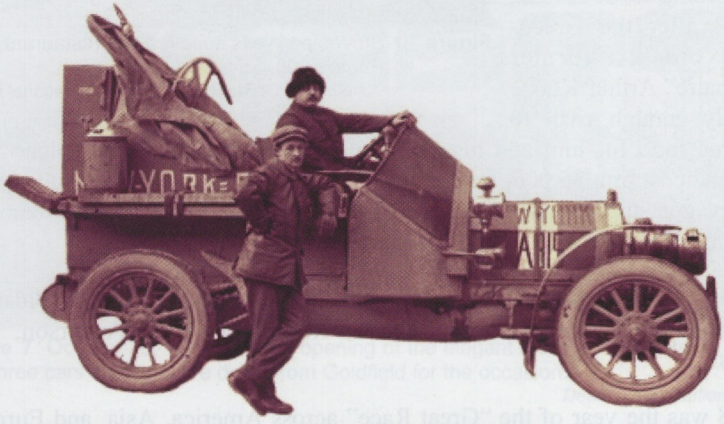


Figure 12 The Italian Brixia-Zust was the second Great Race vehicle to arrive in the Death Valley region.

The last to arrive was the French De Dion-Bouton, seen in Figure 13, with drivers Alph Autran and G. Bourcier Saint Chaffray, which entered Rhyolite on April 1, 1908. Entering Death Valley, they lost the road during a

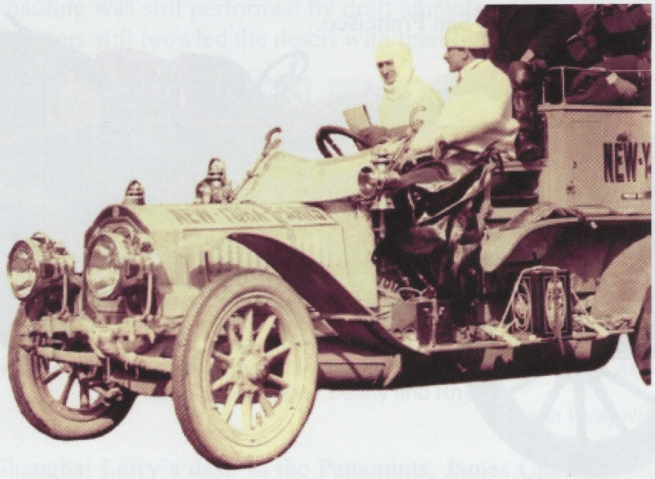


Figure 13 The French De Dion-Bouton was the third and final Great Race Car to enter Death Valley.

sandstorm and ended up in the sand dunes west of Stovepipe Wells. After a rescue party extracted them, they pressed on to Wildrose, Ballarat, and Mojave.

The eventual winner was the Thomas Flyer which gained fantastic publicity for winning the endurance test. Unfortunately, the company couldn't build quality cars fast enough and the poor products they did turn out led to the company's demise in 1912.

In July of 1911, the Rhyolite Herald reported that Death Valley Scotty was, "still meandering the streets of Goldfield. He claims to be trying to make a deal for a good-sized automobile, with which to make a dash across Death Valley..."

Fred Corkill II was the Death Valley Junction mill superintendent for Pacific Coast Borax Company from approximately 1911 to 1925. He was a second generation borax man whose son, Fred Corkill III, would become a vice president for the company in the 1960s. He and his wife, Winifred (nicknamed Winnie), raised their children at the Junction and Santa Monica. They took excursions (Figure 14) to Furnace Creek Ranch. In 1912, Fred got a company car (Figure 15) which was a Cadillac and used

Figure 14 In 1911, Fred Corkill II (right), Winnie (big hat), and unknown couple prepare to take Winnie on her first trip to Furnace Creek Ranch.

Corkill Collection

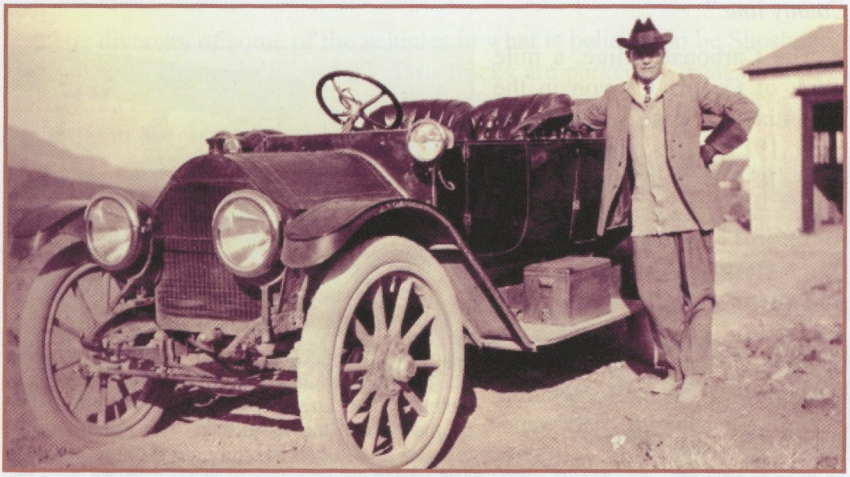


Figure 15 Fred Corkill II at Lila C. mine in 1912 with his first Pacific Coast Borax car, a Cadillac. His wife, Winnie, called it the "Locomobile." *Corkill Collection*

it for trips to the mines and Shoshone as seen in Figure 16. In 1912, the road from Death Valley Junction to Shoshone was still not paved. It would not be paved for another dozen years.

Figure 16 Fred and Winifred Corkill and Mrs. Talbot (rear seat) driving to Shoshone in the Pacific Coast Borax "Locomobile" in 1912.

Brian Brown Collection

In 1914, Albert W. Scott, Jr. and friends bought up 13 square miles of supposed "niter deposits" in southern Death Valley, formed the California Nitrate Development Company, issued a prospectus, built some cabins at Saratoga Springs, went in search of profitable deposits (Figure 17), and never shipped any marketable niter. While studying the niter deposits from 1914-18, noted geologist Levi F. Noble also evaluated the road conditions leading into and out of Saratoga Springs. He described the roads as, "*...poor and are very little traveled, most of them simply beaten tracks that follow the easiest route across the country. ...the average speed of the car will not usually exceed 12 miles per hour. The Geological Survey has placed signs at the intersections of all main traveled roads in this part of the desert as far north as the Inyo County line.*"

Figure 17 California Nitrate Development Co. Model T at Saratoga Springs. Circa 1914. Note the configuration of the rear tires for added traction.

Death Valley National Park

The Carbonate Mine, a mile south of Galena Canyon in the Panamints, was in operation from 1915 to its final closure circa 1933. Initially, mine owner Jack Salsberry used a fleet of trucks to move the ore over the Black Mountains to the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad Station at Zabriskie. In order to reduce shipping costs, he experimented with various vehicles including tractors. Perhaps he tried something like Fairbank's tractor shown in Figure 18.

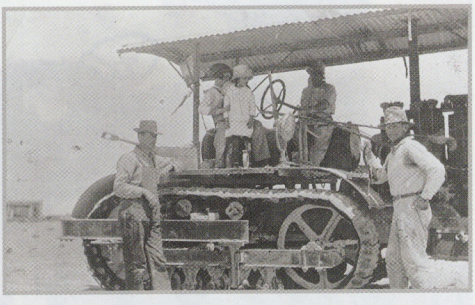


Figure 18 Gasoline tractor operated by Dave Fairbanks, son of "Dad" Fairbanks and uncle to Celestia Lisle Lowe. Dave Fairbanks is standing on the right in the white shirt. The tractor is said to have been used to haul gold ore. Picture circa 1910-1915.

UNLV, Celesta Lowe Collection

John W. and Dennis Searles filed borax claims at Searles Marsh, April of 1874. Along with them were E. W. Skillings and J. D. Creigh. The Searles brothers built a plant, at what is now Trona, and used mules to haul borax to Mojave. As time progressed, ownership changed as did the means of transportation in the Searles Valley area. During 1915-16, a new mineral processing plant was under construction. Large, heavy duty trucks had not yet evolved. Construction crews improvised and met their transportation needs by using a hybrid of motor vehicles and horse drawn wagons as shown in Figures 19 and 20. In 1915, Searles Lake was flooded. Some of the locals decided to test the amphibian capabilities of their vehicles as shown in Figure 21.

Figure 19 Transporting a water tank during construction of Trona Plant circa 1915.
Photo courtesy of the Searles Valley Historical Society, Trona, CA

Figure 20 Early power shovel during construction of Trona Plant circa 1916.
Photo courtesy of the Searles Valley Historical Society, Trona, CA

Figure 21 Riding in a light truck on flooded surface of Searles Lake, 1915.
Photo courtesy of the Searles Valley Historical Society, Trona, CA

The diversity of some of the vehicles in what is believed to be Shoshone in the 1920s is shown in Figure 22. Two trucks are parked in front of the Post Office, an auto is parked next to a store offering gasoline and Fisk tires, and a coupe is in the right foreground.

Figure 22 Diverse trucks and cars are parked in 1920s Shoshone. Gasoline in cans and Fisk tires were sold.
Gilliam Family Collection

Young Fred Corkill III was honing his driving skills in Death Valley Junction as seen in Figure 23. He would grow up to be a executive with Pacific Coast Borax and a third generation employee.

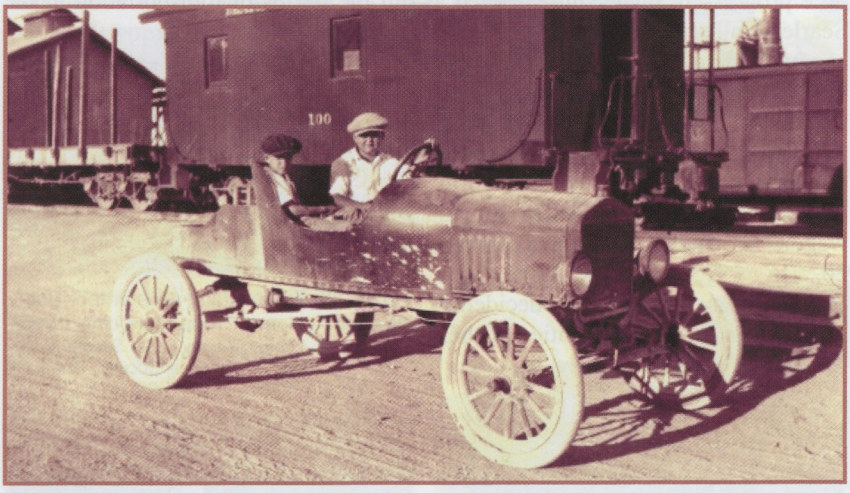


Figure 23 Original Caption: *"Frederick & his first car—'Happy Days' D.V. Jct."* Photo 1924 of Fred Corkill III driving. *Corkill Collection*

J. Irving Crowell, Figure 24, formed the Chloride Cliff Mining Co. in 1906 and added numerous claims thereafter. Located in the northern Funeral Mountains, the gold mines were never a bonanza. They operated from 1906 to 1917.

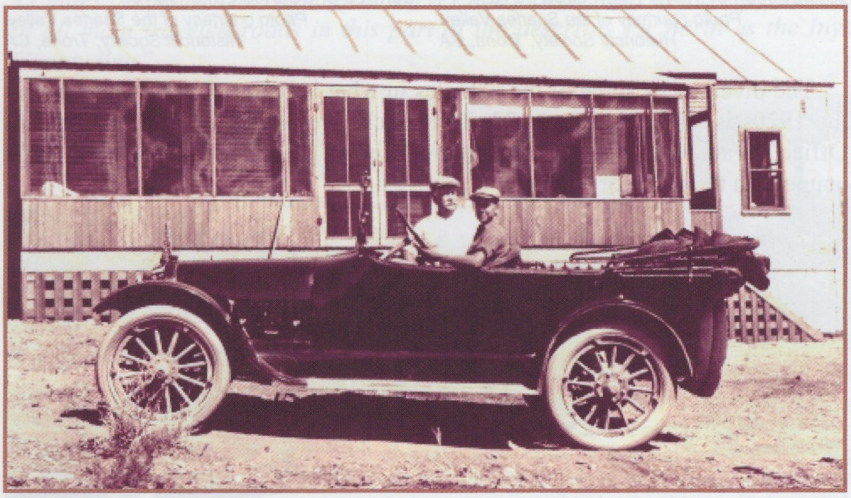


Figure 24 Josiah Irving Crowell and his teenage son, J. Irving Crowell, Jr., in a 1917 Buick at their house at the Chloride Cliff mines in the Funeral Mountains.
UNLV Special Collections, Crowell Collection

Beside locomotives, the Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad, (T&TRR) and Death Valley Railroad, (DVRR) both had "emergency cars" converted to run on the rails. T&TRR converted an Acme Auto touring car to run on its standard gauge tracks. It had right-hand drive, a large windshield, chain drive, French horn, outboard gearshift, and flared fenders. Figure 25 (top) shows T&TRR Superintendent Wash Cahill relaxing in the backseat as the car speeds along the T&TRR tracks. Mrs. Harry Gower is in the front seat with an unknown driver. The DVRR's emergency car, seen in Figure 25 (bottom), was a 1912 Cadillac converted to run on narrow gauge track.

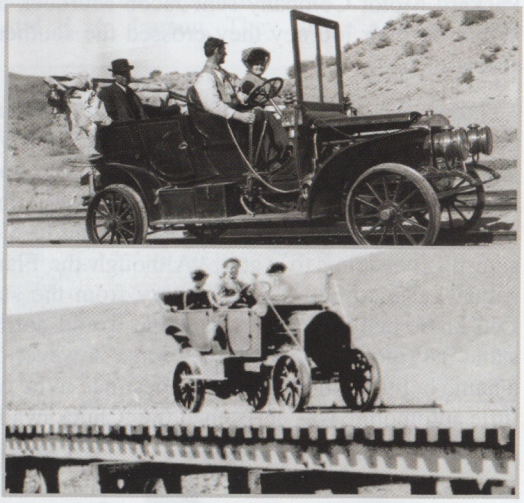


Figure 25 "Emergency cars": (top) T&TRR with W. W. Wash Cahill (backseat), Mrs. Gower, & unknown driver and (bottom) DVRR with Major Boyd, Mrs. Gower, and Pauline Gower. *Death Valley National Park Courtesy Rio Tinto Minerals (U. S. Borax Collection)*

Frank M. Jenifer, President of Pacific Coast Borax, would occasionally inspect the Mill at Death Valley Junction and the mines near the town of Ryan. While on one of these trips, Mr. and Mrs. Jenifer and friends visited Zabriskie Point (Figure 26). Note they have driven up on the unpaved "Indian Detour." Today the area is paved; however, excessive traffic and safety considerations preclude automobile traffic to this point.

Figure 26 Mrs. F. Jenifer (left) and Mr. Jenifer (extreme right) visit Zabriskie Point in a Cadillac. *Death Valley National Park Courtesy Rio Tinto Minerals (U. S. Borax Collection)*

Early Automobile Testing and Advertising in Death Valley

Unlike the highly publicized and grueling Great Race endurance test, the Packard Motor Company sent Jacob Murdock and his family across country. While on their journey they crossed the southern end of Death Valley in the spring of 1908.

From 1911 to early 1917, Lou Wescott Beck and his dog, Rufus (Figure 27) traveled about the Mojave Desert and Death Valley region putting up signs identifying the direction to water. Studebaker got testing and publicity in 1912 by providing Lou Beck, who was known as the "Good Samaritan of Death Valley," with a Flanders '20' automobile to aid him in his efforts to install sign posts leading to water. "Although the Flanders *Witt* Special model was somewhat modified by the factory from the standard Flanders Touring Car, Lou knew that these changes alone would not be substantial enough to withstand the rigors of desert travel. First, however, he decided that the car needed a name befitting the work it was destined to be called upon to do. So the sturdy little automobile was christened the 'Chuckawalla Flanders.'"

Figure 27 The original Lou Beck caption reads "Ready for a run across a playa – or dry lake." Beck's dog, Rufus, sits in the Flanders. Lettering on car reads, "Chuckwalla Flanders '20,' United States Tires, Death Valley."
Lou Wescott Beck, Mojave Desert Archives, Goffs, CA.

A 1913 test of a Dodge car ended tragically. Rhyolite's Pete Busch and driver Roy Shaw left Los Angeles and crossed Panamint Valley and the Panamint Mountains on their way home. They got stuck in dunes near Stovepipe Wells. The chauffer survived, Pete did not.

The year 1916 saw an Essex car tour and another Dodge car tour. A Dodge Bros. advertising brochure claimed testing was done at 144 ^{0}F. Later, a Nash dealer had a photograph taken exclaiming it was 151^{0}F when the Nash car was tested. Other car tests included second and third Essex tests in 1920 and 1922, a Chevrolet test in 1922, and numerous Franklin tests.

In February 1922, six men from Franklin Motor Cars Agency and Pacific Mutual Insurance Company set out to explore parts of Death Valley. The party was comprised of C. I. D. Moore, Douglas E. C. Moore, A. Putnam, Roy S. Hoagland, D. C. MacEwen, and R. L. Larson. They drove a 1920, five-passenger Franklin "Camel" touring car and a 1918 Franklin "Dromedary" car. They brought all camping, food, water, and fuel supplies with them. Their starting point and terminus was Barstow. They visited Cave Spring, Saratoga Springs, Confidence Mill, Bennett's Well, Eagle Borax Works, Devil's Golf Course (Figure 26) , Furnace Creek, Golden Canyon, Rhyolite, and Beatty.

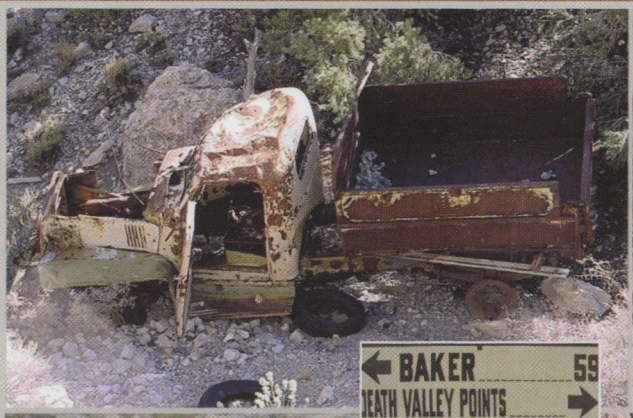
Figure 28 Following in the ruts of late 1880s 20-mule team wagons, Franklin cars cross Devil's Golf Course in 1922. *A . Putnam, Death Valley National Park*

The 1922 trip to Death Valley was nothing unusual for the air cooled Franklins because of Los Angeles dealer, Ralph Hamlin. In 1905, he started testing, racing, and just driving Franklins in the Death Valley area a number of times each year. Hamlin, who controlled eleven Franklin dealerships, conducted tests such as the 1925, 100-Mile Non-Stop Low Gear Run (Figure 29) and the 1926 test in which he drove backwards for 75-miles.

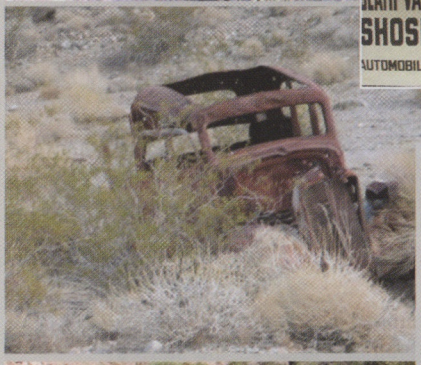
Figure 29 In July 1925, the Franklin "100Mile Non-Stop Low Gear Run" stops for a photo in Devil's Golf Coarse. *Courtesy of Death Valley Fund*

A sideline note about Franklins:

One day, our own Death Valley Scotty drove his Franklin into Dad Fairbanks service station. Dad used a Stillson wrench to try to remove what he thought was a radiator cap. One must wonder about their relationship.

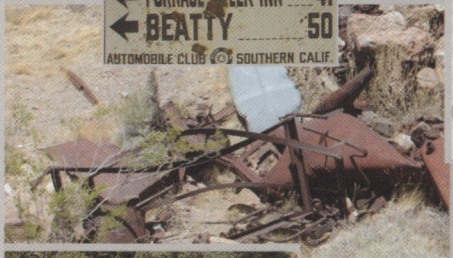


BAKER 59
DEATH VALLEY POINTS
SHOSHONE 23 1/2
AUTOMOBILE CLUB SOUTHERN CALIF.

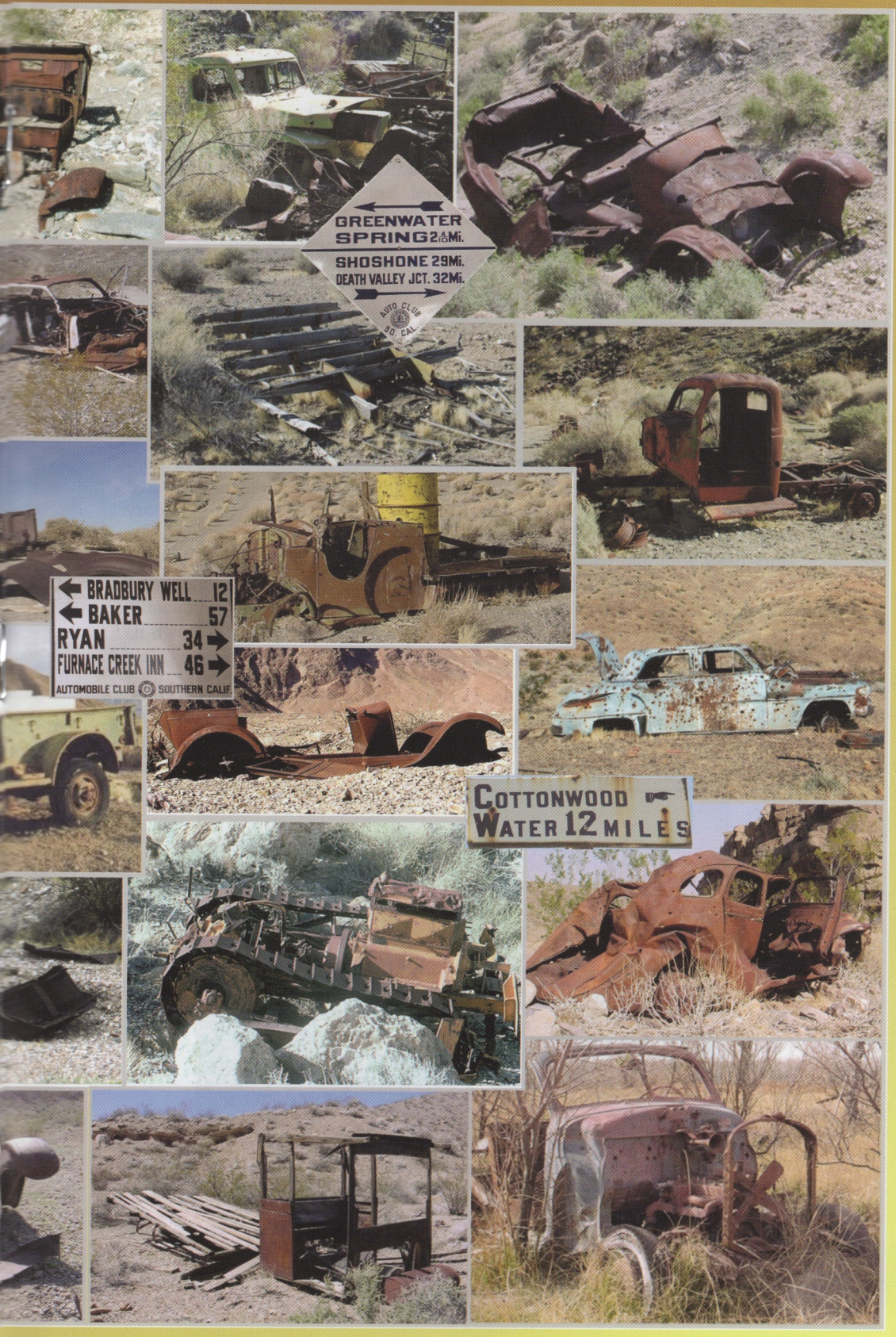


SURVEYORS WELL 11 1/2
TRIANGLE SPRING 13
FURNACE CREEK INN 41
BEATTY 50
AUTOMOBILE CLUB SOUTHERN CALIF.

PIPE 9
MOSAIC SPRING 20
GOLDBELT 24



TRIANGLE SPRING
WATER
AUTOMOBILE CL SOUTHERN CALIF.


GREENWATER SPRING 2½ Mi.
SHOSHONE 29Mi.
DEATH VALLEY JCT. 32Mi.
AUTO CLUB SO. CAL.
BRADBURY WELL 12
BAKER 57
RYAN 34
FURNACE CREEK INN 46
AUTOMOBILE CLUB SOUTHERN CALIF.
COTTONWOOD WATER 12 MILES

A Developing Interest In Motorist's Safety

As more and more motorists frequented the Death Valley roads, it became evident that signs identifying directions to water were required for motorists and other travelers.

In March 1905, California's AB 1174 had been passed and appropriated "...the sum of $5,000 for the purpose of procuring guideposts to be erected in the desert sections of California...." By mid 1907, more than two years later, little had been done.

An article from the August 1909, Touring Topics reads as follows, "The Need of Desert Signs by Dr. S. M. Slocum. The records of suffering from thirst and exposure of the deserts, caused by lack of water and from traveling miles off course, all for the want of some guiding posts to point the traveler [sic, traveler] to safety are too numerous and too horrifying to be repeated." The Automobile Club of Southern California was trying to obtain $2,700 funding from California Governor Gillette to put up desert signposts. Dr. Slocum was asked to provide some rationale as to why this should be done. He related a story about one of his many trips in which he crossed Death Valley. This particular story dealt with him and some companions who found and unsuccessfully attempted to save the life of a man dying of thirst. They had followed the man's tracks for many miles before they found where he collapsed. Unfortunately, the man walked past a spring that would have saved his life had he known its location. The Club wanted to put up signposts in the Panamint Range, Slate Range, and elsewhere.

In 1912, the Auto Club, a pioneer in facilitating Death Valley transportation, put up wood road signs and in 1918 metal signs, identifying roads and springs. In Figure 30, an early Auto Club vehicle is seen crossing Devil's Golf Course.

Figure 30 Auto Club of Southern California, Route & Map Department vehicle crosses Devil's Golf Course.
Automobile Club of Southern California, Death Valley National Park

The Beginnings of Larger Motor Vehicles in Death Valley

In the early years of motoring, Death Valley motor vehicles were evolving and mostly automobile "sized." Perhaps the transportation needs of World War I helped to stimulate the development of larger vehicles. During the construction of Scotty's Castle (1922-29), a heavy six-wheeler Figure 31, truck was used to haul railroad ties. Possibly the driver miscalculated the amount of weight he had on the truck bed. A "steam shovel" and light truck, Figure 32, were employed in the excavation process.

Figure 31 Construction at Scotty's Castle 1922-29.Truck is unloading" railroad ties to be used in the castle's fireplace.
Death Valley National Park

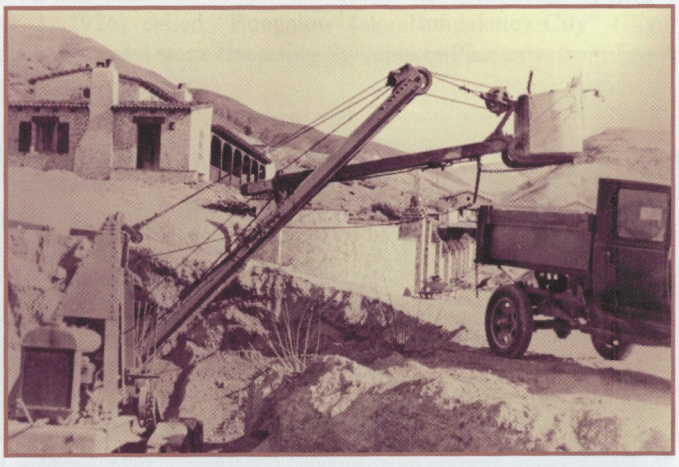


Figure 32 Construction at Scotty's Castle 1922-29. "Power shovel" doing excavation work. *Death Valley National Park*

1924 to 1976 : Mining and Tourism Created the Need for Motor Vehicle Use

By 1924, mining in the Death Valley region had slowed from its boom years at the beginning of the twentieth century. Gone were towns like Greenwater, Rhyolite, Skidoo and Gold Center. The Tecopa Mines were closed in 1916 and would not open again until 1940. Due to low lead prices, they would close again in 1957. Darwin mine operations were intermittent and would also close in 1957. Due to the discovery of more economical borate deposits near Kramer Junction in California, the borate mining ceased in the Death Valley region by 1925. Talc mining persisted in the southern Panamint, Nopah, and Kingston Ranges until the late 1970s and early 1980s. The T&TRR continued operations until 1940. It was maintained through 1941. In 1942, the T&TRR's tracks were torn up for steel to aid the war effort. Starting as early as 1924, tourism started to grow. It would help to create the need for the formation of Death Valley National Monument and be fueled by the Monument's creation. Tourism would continue to grow and see a major spike during the 1949 California Centennial Celebration. And as tourism increased, the need for new roads and tourist facilities increased which, in turn, created more tourism.

Tourists had been trickling into the region for years; however, around 1924 things seemed to accelerate.

The Evolution of Tourism and Motor Vehicles

Death Valley Junction reconstruction (Figure 33) was completed in 1924. It was a unique desert corporate town for its time. The "U-shaped" complex, today's Amargosa Hotel and Opera House, was described as having a "fine restaurant and twelve first class rooms for tourists." It would be expanded in 1929.

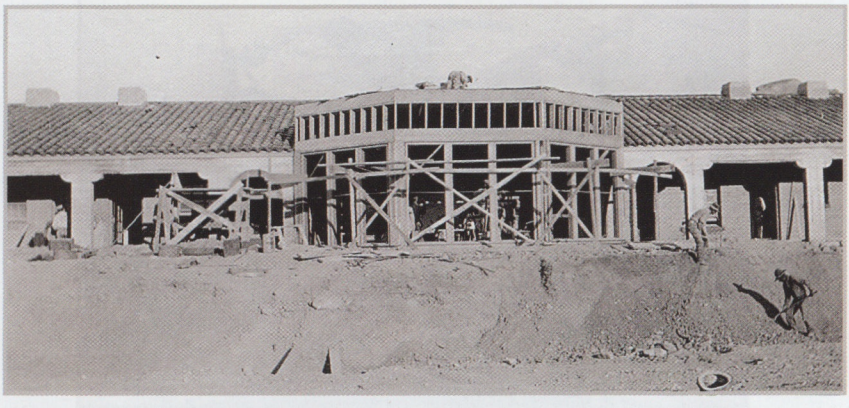


Figure 33 Death Valley Junction reconstruction underway in 1924. Facilities for tourists would be included. *Brian Brown*

Figure 34 Glendale High School students stayed overnight at Egbert's Cave Spring resort, circa 1925. *Death Valley National Park*

In 1925 over at Cave Spring in the Avawatz Mountains (Figure 34), Adrian Egbert, who had been in the area since 1894, enlarged some existing caves; built a store, gas station, and guest rooms; and opened his doors for any tourists or businessmen who happened to be driving through. Egbert's resort was well located and facilitated motor vehicle traffic coming from the south.

About the same time over in Shoshone, "Dad" Fairbanks and ex-sheriff Charlie Brown attempted to cash in on tourism by building a four-room motel in Shoshone called "Old Timer's Inn." As the tourist trade expanded, they added abandoned cabins from surrounding mines.

The year 1926 saw a flurry of activity at Stovepipe Wells, Furnace Creek, and New Ryan directed towards enticing tourists.

Herman William "Bob" Eichbaum and wife Helene completed a toll road from Darwin to Stovepipe Wells (May 4, 1926). Inyo County promptly fixed the toll rates. At the terminus of the toll road, the Eichbaums opened a hotel (November 1, 1926) called "Bungalow (aka Bungalette) City" (Figure 35). Eichbaum also started a stage line using Studebaker Phaetons, from Los Angeles to his new Bungalow City.

Figure 35 Eichbaum opened "Bungalow City" November 1, 1926.
Courtesy of Frasher 's Foto Collection

In 1925 American Car and Foundry (ACF), nominally a railroad passenger car builder, diversified into the motor vehicle world by acquiring a company that manufactured buses and another that manufactured engines. Some time thereafter, their buses (Figure 36) arrived in Death Valley.

Figure 36 ACF Observation Parlor Coach in Death Valley circa 1927.
Death Valley National Park

Because Ryan's closure meant the T&TRR wouldn't be carrying any more borax and thereby loose revenue, it was decided to pursue the tourist trade and generate rail passengers. The Union Pacific Railroad agreed to carry passengers and Pullman cars to its junction with T&TRR at Crucero (October – May) if Baker agreed to build a hotel. The Death Valley Hotel Company, Ltd. (owned by Borax Consolidated Limited) was formed and construction on the Furnace Creek Inn began. The initial phase of the Inn was completed in 1927 (Figure 37). From 1927 to 1930, Pacific Coast Borax used the converted facilities at New Ryan as the Death Valley View Hotel. Much later, 1932, facilities were opened at Furnace Creek Ranch. From the junction with the Union Pacific, the T&TRR transported the passengers and Pullmans to Death Valley Junction (or Beatty). The Death Valley Railroad (DVRR) carried passengers

Figure 37 1926-27 Construction of Furnace Creek Inn. Initial phase was completed in February, 1927.
Death Valley National Park

from Death Valley Junction to Ryan where Union Pacific seven-passenger open touring buses could take passengers to Furnace Creek Inn.

In 1926, seven tourists toured the Death Valley region. They came past Egbert's resort at Cave Spring and headed north visiting Confidence Mill, Ashford Mill, Bennett's Well, Furnace Creek Ranch, Stovepipe Wells, and Rhyolite and home through Shoshone and Calico. The accommodations were a little rough but the ladies seemed to make due with their Rest Room (Figure 38). The two passenger cars and one truck (Figure 39) survived the trip.

Figure 38 Ladies Restroom for these tourists. *Bancroft Library*

Figure 39 1926 Tourists crossing Devil's Golf Course on the old 20 Mule Team road. *Bancroft Library*

Burton Frasher, Sr. was a photographer who traveled about the Southwest. For thirty years, he returned repeatedly to Death Valley with his son and wife. Frasher took numerous pictures for postcards thereby preserving for posterity the people, places, and things of 1920s-1950s. Frasher and family are seen in Figure 40.

Figure 40 Burton Frasher and family at Dante's View in 1928. *Courtesy Frasher Fotos Collection*

In 1929, starlets and others posed with the Utah Parks Co. (Union Pacific subsidiary) touring car (Figure 41) in order to stimulate the tourist trade. Other buses (Figures 42) also frequented the Death Valley region with varying degrees of success.

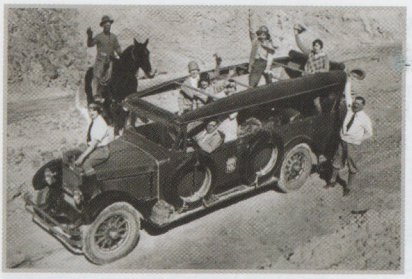


Figure 41 The Union Pacific Tourist bus, carried passengers from New Ryan to the Furnace Creek Inn.
Union Pacific, Death Valley National Park

Figure 42 Bus travel in 1934. This bus from Los Angeles was stuck in the sand and overheated.
Harry Rosenburg, Jr. Collection

Figure 43 shows two visitors examining the boiler at Eagle Borax Works. The vehicle appears to be a 1930(?) Model A Ford Town Sedan.

Figure 43 Visitors driving a Ford Model A examine Eagle Borax Works, circa 1930. *Death Valley National Park*

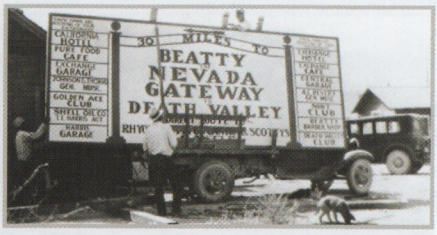


Figure 44 A sign to attract tourists was placed east of Beatty.
UNLV Special Collections, Lisle Collection

Over in Beatty, the businessmen were also pursuing the tourist trade. In the early 1930s Beatty, NV, a highway sign at the Beatty Auto Court was being moved. The Figure 44, sign was placed 30 miles down the highway toward Las Vegas, in the vicinity of Lathrop Wells, NV. Note the listing of businesses supplying food, lodging and gas for the weary motorist.

Creation of Death Valley National Monument... More Roads

President Hoover signed Executive Proclamation 2028, creating Death Valley National Monument (DVNM), on February 11, 1933. The executive order provided that DVNM, consisting of 1,601,800 acres, would be under the supervision, management, and control of the National Park Service (NPS). Shortly thereafter, work on buildings and roads began. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) members built 500-miles of roads (185 paved), the NPS station in Wildrose Canyon, NPS facilities at Cow Creek, trails, signs, and campgrounds, and developed springs throughout the Death Valley region. CCC personnel worked in DVNM until 1942 when their work was terminated due to World War II. While building all the new facilities, Death Valley saw some different types of motor vehicle… the bulldozers, graders, and 10 wheel tank trucks seen in Figures 45 to 48.

Motor Vehicle Thieves... and the Law

Following close on the heels of the motorists were those who would like to relieve them of their vehicles. Some of the miscreants were identified by articles in the Inyo Independent:

1935, *Inyo Independent*:
"Four Men Caught With Stolen Auto At Beatty, Nevada."

March 3, 1944, *Inyo Independent*:
"**17-Year-Old Youth Arrested After Chase In Darwin on Charges of Stealing Autos.**"

June 16, 1944, *Inyo Independent*:
"**Shoshone Auto Theft Suspect Captured After 95 - Mile - Per - Hour Chase in L. A.,** *...Richard Peabody, Seaman second class, was arrested by Inglewood police after he had wrecked an automobile belonging to Mrs. Celestia Gilliam of Shoshone, daughter of State Senator Charles Brown. He was returned to Inyo County to face charges...*"

November 28, 1947, *Inyo Independent*:
"**Attempted Auto Theft Halted in Shoshone After Mad Chase.** *The calm atmosphere of Shoshone suffered a compound fracture Sunday when James J. Day, 29, San Pedro, was finally overpowered after absorbing considerable alcohol, attempting to take one car, taking a truck and then failing to escape in a mad dash in the truck. ...Day was spotted taking the truck, which was near a service station in Shoshone. Residents gave chase in State Senator Charles Brown's automobile, finally catching Day after he had driven down the old railroad bed and mired it down in the ground.*" This must have given the Shoshone residents a topic of conversation for some time.

Following close on the heels of the thieves were the men with the handcuffs… the law and their vehicles. Some of these included Big Dan Modine who was the Constable in Shoshone in the middle 1930s, Harry Rosenburg who was the Constable in Tecopa in the 1960s, W. H. "Brownie" Brown the Sheriff at Death Valley Junction in the 1930s to 1950s (he didn't need to carry a gun), John J. Vignolo Sheriff for the Beatty, Ash Meadows, and Pahrump area from 1931 until 1946, National Park Service Ranger "Mac" MacKinnon

Figure 50 Death Valley National Park Ranger "Mac" MacKinnon.
Death Valley National Park

Figure 51 Sheriff Bob Revert of Beatty, Ash Meadows, and Pahrump.
UNLV Special Collections, Revert

(Figure 50) and Bob Revert (Figure 51) the Nye County Deputy Sheriff for Beatty, Ash Meadows and Pahrump from 1946 until 1960.

Motor Vehicle Attendance Increased

Throughout the years 1924-1976 many tourists with many different types of motor vehicles visited Death Valley. In the early days, hardy souls ventured into an area that had few good roads and even fewer facilities. As time moved on; roads, facilities, and motor vehicles improved and more and more vehicles and their occupants arrived in the Death Valley area. For example, in November, 1958, 5,072 cars entered Death Valley through Wildrose Canyon and 5,547 over Towne Pass. As many as that may seem, a much larger contingent (Figure 52) arrived nine years earlier for the California Centennial Celebration in November of 1949. The number of motor vehicles are unknown. The following newspaper article estimate is high; however, attendance far exceeded expectations.

Figure 52 An overflow crowd and attendance at the 1949 Centennial Celebration in Desolation Canyon.
Death Valley National Park

December 9, 1949, Inyo Independent:
"**Estimate 80,000 Visit Death Valley for Centennial.** *An adventurous and enthusiastic crowd, estimated at 80,000 persons [organizers had expected approximately 5,000], jammed Death Valley last weekend to attend the re-enactment of the historic Jayhawker-Manly-Bennett-Arcane trek through the 'Valley of Death' in 1849. An overflow crowd of 20,000 jammed Desolation canyon to witness the most magnificent and inspiring California Centennial celebration this state has presented."*

Mining Operations Also Required Motor Vehicles...and Roads

Mining operations required motor vehicles which were quite different than those driven by tourists visiting the region. Besides the smaller vehicles that transported mining personnel hither and yon, many mining vehicles eventually became big trucks that were used in moving bulk from the mines to mills, smelters, ore bins, or railroads. Figure 53 shows a truck from the 1930s.

In order to get supplies in and shipping ore out, mines needed roads that connected them to main roads built by Inyo County. This required heavy equipment to move earth and possibly required blasting to carve out a road along shear mountain rock face. A road up Titus Canyon to the so called mines at Leadfield was built in the winter of 1925-26.

Figure 53 1937 Noonday Mine. Dr. Lincoln D. Godshall, the mine's owner (left); "Deke" Lowe Jr. (mid); watchman "Uncle Billy" (right) and mine truck.
UNLV Special Collections, Celesta Lowe Collection

The 16-miles of road that leads from Nevada Highway 374 to Leadfield and, in so doing, crossed 5,000 foot elevation passes and crawled along shear mountainsides was built in 1925-6 by C.C. Julian's company. It required a significant amount of blasting to carve it out of the steep mountain faces. Drill holes are still visible north of Red Pass. Besides getting miners and their vehicles (Figure 54) to Leadfield, the road was used in March of 1926 to transport hundreds of investors to Leadfield via automobiles. The traffic jam and weary investors are seen in Figure 55.

Figure 54 A Leadfield miner's truck was parked behind the general store and near his tent. February 1926.
Death Valley National Park

Figure 55 Leadfield investors were transported to the bogus lead mines by a fleet of automobiles. A Ford Model T sedan is in the left foreground. March 1926. *Death Valley National Park*

In the 1940s and 1950s, Mojave Mud Trucking hauled talc from Louise Grantham's talc mines in Warm Springs Canyon (eastern Panamint Range) to Dunn railroad siding. Figure 56 shows one of their 10-wheel trucks. Another trucking company in the same area was Paulson and March Trucking.

Figure 56 1951 Mojave Mud Trucking picked up talc at Louise Grantham's mines.
Death Valley National Park

During the late 1940s and middle 1950s, trucks from lead/silver mines at Tecopa hauled ore to a mill or an ore bin for shipment. Milling grade ore to be concentrated went to a nearby ball mill at the headwaters of Willow Creek. After it was concentrated, it was trucked directly to a smelter in Utah. Shipping ore was trucked to a large ore bin (Figure 57) east of California Highway 127. From there, Vernace B. Morgan Trucking drivers would haul the ore to the Union Pacific siding at Dunn. The trucks were big and slow 150 horsepower Kenworths (Figure 58). George Ross (miner, heavy equipment operator, historian) remembers that the trucks had a monitoring device that was called a "stool pigeon" and was located directly behind the driver's head. It was a continuously rotating wax cylinder that had a needle attached. Sudden vibrations, like the starting and stopping of the truck, was seen as spikes on the wax cylinder. This device enabled the Morgan Brothers to tell how many times a truck was started and stopped and the time interval between starts and stops. One driver was fired when he showed up in Tecopa with a young lady, a big smile, and a wax cylinder that showed he made five, long duration stops between Baker and Tecopa. Obviously they had stopped to admire the wildflowers.

Figure 57 This structure was two ore bunkers. The bunker on the right was used for talc while the left bunker was for ore from the Noonday mines. Mine operators would have their trucks fill the appropriate bunker. Drivers for Morgan Brothers Trucking would pull their Kenworth 150 horsepower trucks up to the bunker, lower the metal chutes into the truck bed, open gates by each chute, and let the truck bed fill. Note that two of the three metal chutes can still be seen in the left of the photo
Ken Lengner

Figure 58 George Ross, circa 1946, alongside the V. B. Morgan 150 horsepower Kenworth truck he drove when hauling ore from the Tecopa mines. Photo is at the V. B. Morgan location on the east side of Tecopa Hot Springs Road. They would later move to the south side and develop the area with the trucking yard, restaurant, and housing.
George Ross

Harry Adams, owner of a small talc mine in the Tecopa area, hauled his talc to the bunker seen in Figure 53 for transporting to Dunn siding by Morgan Brothers Trucking. Harry and his truck are seen in Figure 59.

Figure 59 Harry Adams unloading talc. *Stella Rook Collection*

As time progressed, more roads were bulldozed out of the country side by new and larger bulldozers. Figure 60 shows 1956 road construction going up to Trona Potash Company located in the Panamint Valley on the eastern slope of the Slate Range.

Figure 60 A road is bulldozed to Trona Potash so that other motor vehicles could reach the mine.
George Ross

Sometimes motor vehicles were disassembled by mine operators to serve purposes other than transporting people or things from one place to another. Figure 61 illustrates motor vehicles converted to hoists.

Figure 61 Motor vehicles occasionally spent their last days at a mine used as the power source for lifting or pulling something up the side of a hill or out of a mine. Three examples are seen at the King Midas mine (top), Furnace mine (middle), and at a Grantham talc mine (bottom). *Danny Ray Thomas*

1976 to Present: Tourism and NPS Operations Define the Need for Motor Vehicle Use

Mining would come to a halt and tourism and NPS operations dictated the motor vehicles found in the Death Valley region.

Minimal Motor Vehicles Required for Mining

Congress passed the Public Law 94-429, Mining in Parks Act, September 28, 1976. Mining claims filed after September 28, 1977 were declared null and void. Valid claims were either permitted to continue or NPS bought claims. Invalid claims were declared void. Man's impact on the Death Valley National Monument's topography slowed. Use of mining related motor vehicles within the Monument was drastically reduced. In 1989, Death Valley National Monument talc mining claims were bought by the Conservation Foundation and donated to the National Park Service. Mining continued in the Death Valley region exterior to the Monument at places like the Billie Mine (borates) located near New Ryan. Its eighteen wheelers hauled borates to a processing plant in the Amargosa Valley until the mine closed in 2006. Searles Valley "mines" the mineral laden water by pumping the fluids into processing plants. The Trona Railway runs from Searles Valley to Searles Station where it connects with Union Pacific railroad negating the need for motor vehicle transportation to the railhead.

Tourism Responsible for Majority of Motor Vehicles

For quite some time, Death Valley has been a Mecca for tourists from all over the United States and all over the world. Tourists from North America drive in with their a) motor homes towing jeeps or other transportation, b) pickup trucks with trailers or fifth wheels, and c) passenger vehicles with camping equipment. Sport utility vehicles (SUVs), Figures 62 and 63, abound.

Figure 62 Jeeps are popular vehicles for exploring the backcountry.
Ken Lengner

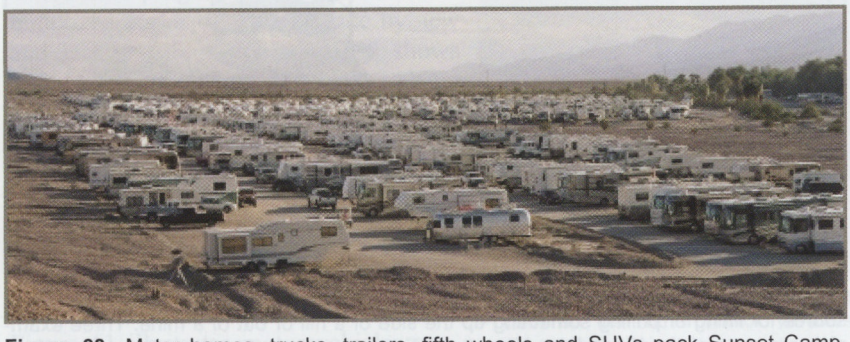


Figure 63 Motor homes, trucks, trailers, fifth wheels and SUVs pack Sunset Campground during the 2006 Death Valley '49er Encampments. *Marv Jensen*

Various four wheel drive clubs and motorcycle clubs have caravans and rallies. The annual Death Valley '49er Encampment results in a plethora of motor vehicles that maximize parking space requirements. International and homegrown tourists arrive in a) huge buses (Figure 64) b) rented motor homes, or c) rental cars. Up to 25 buses arrive daily.

Figure 64 Huge buses bring visitors from all over the United States and the world to visit Death Valley. *Ken Lengner*

National Park System Operations

Conducting daily operations and maintaining the largest Park in the contiguous United States requires many different vehicles (Figure 65-70) such as a) four wheel drive vehicles for the protection rangers working in the field, b) vehicles for interpretation rangers conducting tourist programs or formal school educational programs, c) pickups for material transportation, d) graders and plows for road maintenance, e) ambulances for emergency response, f) specialized vehicles for studies, or g) construction vehicles for major repairs or new features.

Figure 65 One type of Four Wheel Drive vehicle used by Rangers. *Ken Lengner*

Figure 66 Well drilling rig for habitat restoration. *Ken Lengner*

Figure 67 Furnace Creek Wash major road repair after severe flash flooding. Earth Mover. 2005. *Ken Lengner*

Figure 68 Heavy equipment for water retention facility construction in Furnace Creek Wash. 2008 *Ken Lengner*

Figure 69 Emergency response vehicle. *Ken Lengner*

Figure 70 Education vehicle *Ken Lengner*

Road Reduction

With the reduction of mining and the resultant end of road maintenance by mine owners, creation of wilderness area, and minimal budget allocated for Park and BLM road maintenance, the roads available to visitors in the Park and Bureau of Land Management lands comprising the Death Valley region have decreased.

Motor Vehicle Testing

Motor vehicle testing in Death Valley continues today, particularly in the summer time. Motorists often see groups of cars, with CB antennas on their roofs, heading single file up some Death Valley mountain or along the broiling valley floor. Sometimes these vehicles have bonnets on their front, rear, or both ends. Manufacturers are hiding vehicle features from prying eyes, or more appropriately, prying cameras of a competitor or a magazine. Automakers from all over the world, including Kia, Ford, Volvo, Skoda, Hyundai, etc., come to see if their engines, air conditioners, and transmissions can withstand the excruciating heat. Motor Trend Magazine traditionally pushes the performance limits of SUVs such as Ford Escape, Nissan Xterra, Lincoln Navigator, Mitsubishi Montero, Chevrolet Blazer and Tahoe, etc. and then reports back to its readers. Summer time is a time of numerous test vehicles, testers, and spies.

. . . and you thought we forgot him and his car!

Death Valley Scotty

Courtesy Death Valley National Park

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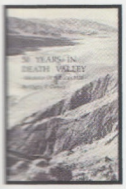
The Death Valley '49ers

Books



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Death Valley '49ers publication # 09 **164 pages in Soft Cover**

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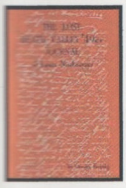
"Harry P. Gower was not just a spectator but often a prime mover in events in Death Valley. Surveying for railroads, routing claim jumpers, and managing a pioneer resort hotel."
- L. Burr Belden, Past President, The Death Valley '49ers

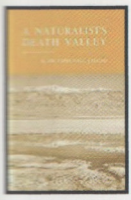


The Lost Death Valley '49er Journal of Louis Nusbaumer by George Koenig

Death Valley '49ers publication # 11 **84 pages in Soft Cover**

Louis Nusbaumer (1819-1878), was a German immigrant that left New York City in March, 1849, traveled to Independence, Mo., and there began his trip overland with William Lewis Manly and John Rogers to California.

This is the story of his journey, which was kept in two small notebooks, recovered in 1966, illustrated throughout with drawings, photos and maps. Made available here by the Death Valley '49ers Organization.

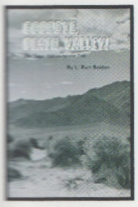


A Naturalist's Death Valley by Dr. Edmund C. Jaeger

Death Valley '49ers publication # 05 76 pages in Soft Cover

A Naturalist's Death Valley is a primer to help the thousands of admiring visitors to Death Valley National Park get a general picture of wild flowers, trees, shrubs, reptiles, birds, insects, mammals, fossils and Native Americans.

Dr. Edmund C. Jaeger was a nationally known naturalist who authored many books on the flora & fauna of California.



Goodbye, Death Valley! The Tragic 1849 Jayhawker Trek by L. Burr Belden

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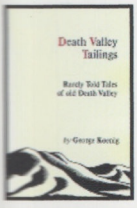
This work traces the largest of several parties who became mired in Death Valley during December 1849. Two members of this party, Jayhawkers, kept diaries of their trip which have been preserved.

They were consulted by the author along with a scrapbook and numerous letters kept by the Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

This work also includes a list of Jayhawkers.



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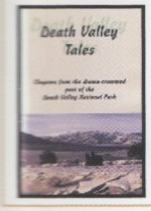

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